

Bad News Dispels the Excitement of a Summer's Day

No one could have imagined the tidings that slowly made their way through Farmington on the afternoon of July 31, 1868, and finally reached the home of Ezra Thompson and Mary Stevenson Clark.

The Clarks' eldest son, Ezra James, on his way home from a three-year mission to England, was dead. Could it really be true?

It must have been tempting to simply disbelieve it was possible. Word had been received so indirectly that it seemed impossible, if not improbable.

News in this small farming community north of Salt Lake City had been buzzing about a trial involving a local man who was charged with rape, involving a young Bountiful woman. Then the news about Ezra James Clark broke and changed the tone of a small town from one of indignation to sorrow.

Arthur Stayner*, correspondent for the Deseret News, said that someone in the community had received a letter from a person on the train home with Ezra James Clark disclosing the news. Elder Clark had died in Upstate New York on the train more than two weeks before of sunstroke on July 14, 1868, somewhere near Albany. Up to this time no one in the community, especially the Clarks, had received any direct information from the company with which he was traveling.¹

It's hard to imagine a more difficult blow to deal with. Excitement had been building in the home for months, but it had nearly overflowed in the past few weeks. The three long years were over and now his eldest son was again on American soil. A joyful reunion was in store.

Ezra James had reached American shores on July 12, 1868, aboard the steamship "Minnesota" in company with 534 saints from England who were immigrating to Zion. The account, published in the Deseret News, just eight days before² had spread through Farmington building enthusiasm for the reunion with each telling. Ezra James Clark was

* Ironically he married Ezra's sister Mary less than a year later. The marriage lasted only a few months.

¹ Journal History 17: 209 and Deseret News Aug. 4, 1886

² Deseret News July 23, 1868, Letter from Pres. Franklin Richards to Brigham Young